MEETING RAMANA MAHARSHI

Conversations with John Sherman

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Edited by Carla Sherman

SilentHeart Press
Ojai, California

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Book & Cover Design: Carla Sherman
Cover Photo: Tim Nobles
Editor: Carla Sherman

Second printing: 2008 Completely revised edition.

SilentHeart Press
PO Box 1566
Ojai, California 93024 USA
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Printed in the United States of America
ISBN 978-0-9718246-0-7

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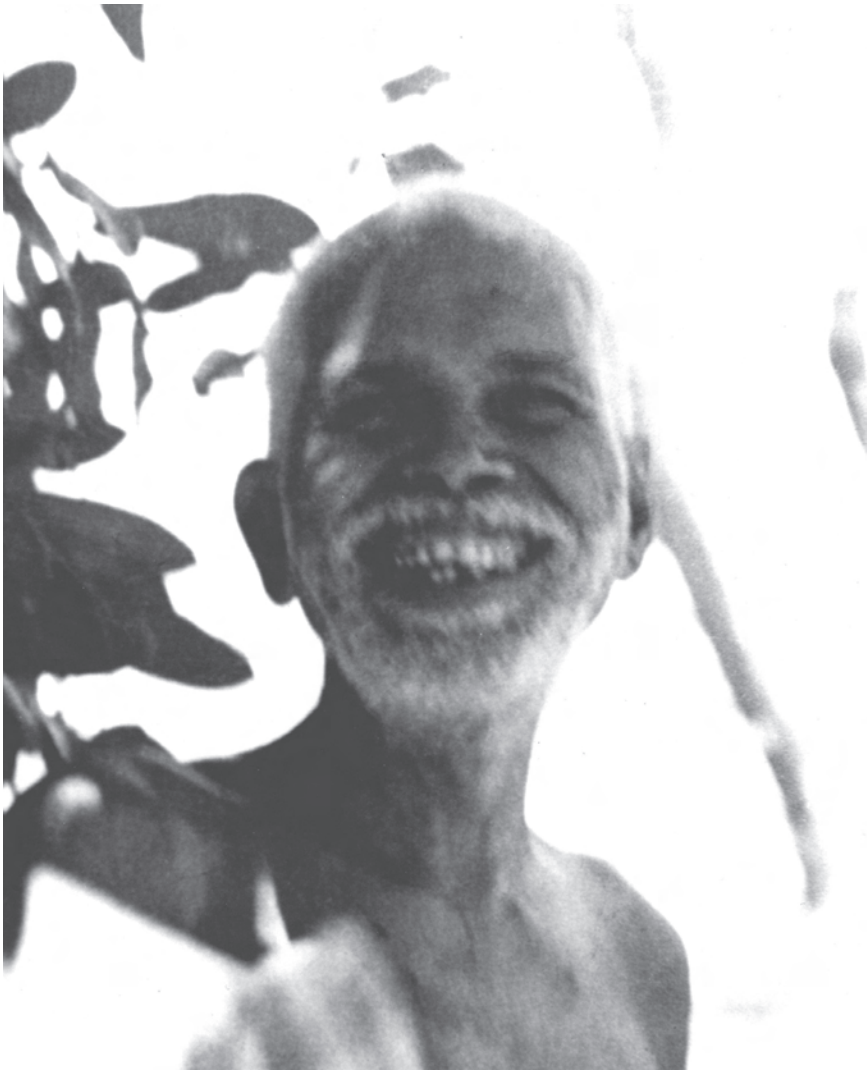
This book contains the edited transcriptions of the One-Day Intensive with John Sherman at the Temescal Gateway Park, in Pacific Palisades, California, on September 22, 2002.



Ramanashram

Sri Ramana Maharshi

Foreword

This book is a fine example of John's no-frills message: a smooth entry into the subject, followed by a simple laying-out of the fundamentals — with no superfluous verbiage.

By current standards, John's voice rings most loud and clear; the comments by the retreatants demonstrate that this is so. It even sounds as though he may germinate a new generation of teachers, as did Papaji.

This is a worthwhile booklet, for those who have no other access to John.

Robert Wolfe
Ojai, California
September 21, 2004

Acknowledgments:

Our sincere gratitude to Laurie Hope, who graciously and wonderfully transcribed the tapes of these meetings.

We are immensely grateful to Robert Wolfe, whose suggestions and comments were very instrumental in making the book what it is now.

Thank you, all of you who came to this intensive. Your presence, reports and questions made this book possible.

Preface

John Sherman met his teacher, Gangaji, in June 1994, when he was in the 15th year of imprisonment in federal prisons for crimes committed in the 70's in the name of armed revolution. Gangaji had been invited to the prison to offer satsang there. In that first meeting, John discovered himself to be eternally and unconditionally free.

After this first meeting with Gangaji, he spent another three-and-a-half years in prison, before he was finally released. During that time, he deeply experienced what has come to be known as "the dark night of the soul". It was a time when everything he thought he had gained in that meeting with Gangaji seemed to disappear, leaving him empty-handed and hopeless. During that time, he started reading Ramana Maharshi's books and, out of desperation, he followed his instructions to the letter.

What he discovered in this true meeting with Ramana Maharshi is offered to you in this book, through his dialogue with spiritual seekers from all over the country.

Find Yourself

Sometimes it just seems so silly to speak. Nothing can ever be added to what is already present *here*, as you. Nevertheless, here we are. I am going to talk a little bit about my story, to begin this morning. Most of you have heard it in one form or another, but I want to put this retreat in context — by which I mean my story.

After 15 years in federal prisons, an absolutely impossible stroke of luck or Grace came to me. Gangaji visited the prison where I was. At the time of meeting Gangaji, I had had a total of six months of spiritual practice. I was unable to meet her the first time she came to the prison: I was too terrified. I didn't know that it was she who had sparked this terror. I am not even certain that it is accurate to make that connection now. Nevertheless, I passed on the first opportunity that I had to meet her, because I was stricken with a great terror, and I immediately began what was to be an extremely truncated Buddhist practice.

I had previously known no interest whatsoever in spiritual practice or spiritual ideas; after all, I was a devoted and committed Marxist/Leninist for whom spiritual practice or spiritual ideas were anathema. Then, somehow, six months after that first missed opportunity, she returned. How unlikely is this? Not only did I get a chance to meet her in a federal prison, but when I was failed to do so the first time, she came back!

In any event, between her first visit to the prison and the

second one, I embarked upon a Buddhist practice. The Tibetan Buddhists were coming to the prison. I was astonished to discover, immediately upon hearing some of their teachings, that I knew everything they were talking about — it was all deeply and intimately familiar to me. The words and the concepts they provided me with, gave me an intellectual understanding of what I already knew. So I began this Tibetan Buddhist practice with great zeal and interest and amazement. I was seen by those who were coming into the prison to be advanced in my understanding, and they brought a Tibetan Lama in to give me refuge and boddhisatva vows.

I also spent those six months in contact with the people who were involved with Gangaji, and all that time I was always denouncing her. I knew very well that what she had to say was foolishness, not to be paid attention to. I was fond of saying, "The Buddhists have been about this business for 2,500 years, and they know what they are doing. This woman comes in here and tells us that you need to 'do nothing'. And she says that, in fact, it is only the things that you are doing that stand in the way of what you are trying to attain!"

So, I called her a fraud. I didn't know what her game was or why in the world she would be coming into a federal prison. There was no money in it for her, there is no fame or fortune to be had there, but one thing was clear to me: she was false. She was a fraud. I used to watch her videos during that period and, in much the same way that I knew what the Buddhists were talking about, I *knew* her. I did not realize that it was the same unexpected, silent

knowing that was present in regard to the Buddhist teachings. It felt more as if I had known her some time earlier in my life; maybe not really well, but well enough so that I could recognize her gestures, the way she carried herself, and the way she spoke. I could not figure out how I knew, her but since it would be in *my* life that I knew her, it did not seem to bode well for her.

When she returned to the prison, in June of 1994, I was able to meet her personally, face to face, upon her arrival. At that point, I had a really satisfactory understanding of spiritual truth. I was quite satisfied with the continued deepening of my intellectual understanding of spiritual reality that had been triggered by my meeting with the Buddhists. Her teaching, such as it was, did not fit into that.

On the day of her second visit, it was I who had set up the room for her. I had taken care of the arrangements and made sure that the people who wanted to see this heretic knew that she was coming. It was my responsibility to meet her when she arrived with her entourage, and to tell them what the arrangements were and to take them to where they would be. When she walked up to me, she took my hand and looked into my eyes quite ordinarily. You know, there wasn't any spiritual energy: she was really quite ordinary, and she said: "Hi. You must be John." She had heard of my energetic opposition to her. And, as she greeted me, I simply dissolved and the whole mechanism of understanding, the whole mechanism of judgment and relationship, of the maintenance of *me* disappeared. It all stopped.

There is no way I can possibly describe to you the experience of that. I am actually confident that all of you here in this room have known this experience, this glimpse, this *momentary* dissolution of identity, the momentary stopping of the mind's frenetic efforts to control, to understand, to do something *about* something. Nothing more happened for the entire time that she was there. When she left that evening, I had fallen hopelessly, wildly, uncontrollably, without restraint, in love with her. When she left my sight, I felt like my heart had been torn out of my chest. I had never imagined such torment, such pain, or such loss.

I saw her one more time, before I was released from prison, and that was six months after our first meeting. Following that second meeting, I was not to see her again for three-and-a-half years, when I was finally released from prison.

In the first year of our meeting, everything that I did was done with the intent of pleasing her. There was nothing I would not have done to earn and hold her love and her attention. I would have done anything, if that could keep her attention and her love on me. I wrote of this love — letter after letter — which were all love letters to her; I had many absolutely extraordinary, magnificent experiences during that year and I wrote of them often to her. She read those letters in satsang, wherever she went.

It had dawned on me, early on, that the only thing that *really* would please her would be for me to wake up. Nothing else. There was nothing else she wanted from me other than that I wake up permanently, that I be "finished" permanently.

That first year was a time of rapture and indescribable intensification of the desire to please her, to win her love, to be what she wanted me to be. Or so I thought. Finally, after a year, this entire edifice of spiritual *melodrama* collapsed into hell and torment. I had tried very hard to deny her what she had wanted. I had tried very hard not to obey her. I had done some things that she saw to be a betrayal. Not a betrayal of her, but a betrayal of myself, a betrayal ultimately of you. I found myself in a hell much bigger, much more inescapable, much more horrifying than anything I could have ever imagined. The *hell* was as big, as huge and intense as the year of *paradise* had been. It was during that time in hell that I *finally* turned my attention to Ramana Maharshi.

I had ignored Ramana Maharshi. I thought that Ramana was not very interesting, and was not very important. After all, I was Gangaji's pet. I was her favorite. I was eloquent and passionate in the expression that I gave to this love. I heard the stones sing! What did I need with Ramana, simple-minded Ramana, *who-am-I* Ramana? I knew who I was, I had known it since the Buddhists came. I was "infinite, pure, innocent consciousness"— playing as the lover of Gangaji.

But so hopeless and so desperate was I to regain the state that I had lost; so hopeless and so desperate was I to escape from the hell that I had found myself in, that I would have turned to anybody, *even* to Ramana: even this simple minded who-am-I guy that had really nothing very interesting to say. At that point, I did not suppose that he had anything interesting to say. But I finally

realized the depth and the clarity, and the hugeness of Ramana's realization — and his willingness, his determination to give it away.

Ramana spent twelve years without speaking, hiding out from people. But they followed him around and hounded him and, finally, he gave up. And from then until the end of his life, he spent every waking moment giving away this realization, and the method whereby he had realized the truth of *his* being to be the truth of *your* being. The truth of *all* being.

I followed his instructions with the seriousness of intent with which, as they say, "a man with his hair on fire seeks water." My intention was not as pure as it might have been. What I wanted was to escape from hell. But, pure or not, it was big and overriding and very serious.

The reason that I tell you this story is because everything that I speak of today, or in any meeting that you may find me in, is spoken from the experience of having followed the instructions of Ramana Maharshi — within the hugeness of this love that is Gangaji. Everything, that I speak to you about, comes from the experience of having followed his instructions: even when they didn't make any sense to me.

What I had heard from Gangaji, until then, was that I should *do nothing*. That I should stop everything that I was doing. And what I heard from Ramana was that one should make the utmost intense effort of one's entire life to discover the truth of

one's identity. And, in my ignorance at that time, it seemed to me that those two things were *different*. It really had seemed to me for some time that, by making this huge effort that Ramana asks of us, I was in some way betraying Gangaji. But so horrible was the hell (which consisted only of wanting Gangaji's love and believing that I had lost it), and so intense was my determination to escape from this hell, that I would have done anything, even at the cost of denying Gangaji's message and, instead, adopting Ramana's teaching. So I followed Ramana's instructions. I followed them as well as I could. And I am here today to tell you about my experience in following Ramana's instructions — and to pass on to you what I learned from him.

It turns out that Ramana was not as nonverbal as might be imagined. Ramana in fact said a whole lot and, as with any being through which some transmission of the truth must flow, he said many things that are contradictory. He said some things to *some* people, other things to *other* people — as does Gangaji, as does Papaji, as does everyone who tries to speak this unspeakable reality.

So, what you hear from me is what I heard from him. This is not scripture. We do not open a book here, and read from it and then say, "Oh, but he said such-and-such over there." What I have to offer to you is what Gangaji has commanded me to offer you, which is my own experience. My own self. Completely.

One of the most fundamental instructions, one of the most fundamental transmissions that comes from Ramana Maharshi

and also comes from Gangaji and Papaji, is this: everything you know about spirituality is *worthless* here. Every concept, no matter how subtle, no matter how seemingly accurate, no matter how beautiful, no matter how wonderful, every concept without exception — every sutra, every scripture, every mantra, every teaching — is worthless here. It is, in fact, *worse* than worthless. It is a debilitating obstruction to the possibility of you being finished, once and for all, in this moment, with the search for the truth. If you truly want the truth, you must be willing to discard everything you *think* you *know* about it — all the *ideas* of advaita and non-duality, all the ideas of the oneness of being, all the ideas of the experience of realization. Every expectation that you might have must be thrown in the trash. They are no good to you now. Perhaps at one time they were. Ramana speaks often of the usefulness of those teachings to get you as far as you have gotten: to lead you on, to tempt you. But here and now, they are of no use. None.

This is the first thing that I really absorbed from Ramana. And if it is examined, if it is considered just for a second, it will be obvious to you that this is the case. They are of no use now. They *may* return reinvigorated, with new life breathed into them. They may return in such a way that you see them from a different point of view. But for now, for today, throw them away.

Ramana's instruction is regarding the investigation into the actuality of your identity. This is what he encourages us to find — for no reason at all. If you enter into this with the intention of somehow *getting* something from it, you condemn yourself to some unpleasant times. Ramana is very clear: if you are here,

whatever *had* to be done already has been done. If you can listen for five minutes to what I am saying without running from the room, everything that had to be done has been done. The only remaining qualification, according to Ramana, is your *intention*, and in my experience this is the truth.

Now you see right away why spiritual concepts get in the way. If I speak the word "intention," we know from reading all the sutras and all of the scriptures and all of the explanations and the teachings, that intention, in truth, is not anything: that there is no one for *whom* intention can be. Nevertheless, Ramana tells us that the only thing required is the absoluteness of your intention. This is a really good example of why these spiritual ideas have to be discarded, even if they are true.

It turns out Gangaji says the same thing, although I did not hear it from her at first. The intention that is required of you (and this is *all* that is required of you) is the utterly serious determination to know the actuality of your identity. Nothing else. Not the intention to gain enlightenment, not the intention to gain realization, not the intention to be finished with ignorance and suffering. The desire to be finished with suffering is what got you as far as you are now. Now that can be thrown away. The only thing required is the intention to discover the actuality of your identity for yourself. The intention to be finished fooling around, and to answer the only question that matters: Who am I *really*?

I suspect that all human lives ignore this question, and pretend that it is something already known; I *pretend* that I know

who I am — I am the one who is doing all this. I am the one who experiences this body and this life. It is amazing to me, in retrospect, that the utter ignorance of a relationship with any true sense of our identity is so taken for granted, ignored and denied.

This is all that is asked of you: at least for this time we have together, that you want more than anything — to the exclusion of everything else — to get the actuality of your identity. Ramana tells us, and I have found this to be the case, that the only thought that should be of any interest to you, the only thought that should have any draw for your attention is what he calls the "I-thought", by which he means ego. For Ramana, the words "ego", "I" and "mind", all point exactly to the same thing. Mind is ego, "I" is ego. Ego is, in truth, everything there is to us.

One thing is sure: as you sit here, you have a sense of identity, a sense of existence, a sense of being *something*, you know not what. Ramana calls this sense the "I-thought", and he tells us that no other thought is worth looking at. All other thought, without exception, can be distinguished from this core thought. Because every *other* thought, no matter how vicious, no matter how low-minded, no matter how high-minded, or no matter how wondrous in its intent or its beauty or its subtlety, every other *thought* has a relationship with "I." Every thought other than "I" has a *relationship* with "I." It springs from "I" — what I like about things, what I do not like about things, what I refuse to accept about things, what I do about things, what I want, what I need, or what I don't want, what must go away… All of it, without exception, relates directly back to this core thought "I,"

which according to Ramana, is ego — as is the entirety of the mind. Therefore, Ramana suggests that we refuse to attend to any thought except the thought "I." Ramana encourages us, demands of us, begs us, pleads with us, to attend only to "I." To refuse attention to all the other thoughts that go on, and instead to turn our attention inward toward the thinker, toward the *source* of thought.

When we use this word "source," we think we know what we are talking about. Especially in spiritual circles, the "source," of course, is this "infinite ocean of consciousness." That is not what Ramana says. Ramana says the source of all appearance is ego. So the target of our investigation is ego. Ramana asks us to *find* ego, to find "I." And *who* is it that is to perform this investigation? Ego. It is ego that *does* everything. It is ego that is the motor, the engine, by which the entire universe is manifest. And it is the belief in ego as our identity that is the source of all suffering, all hatefulness, all murder, all betrayal, all misery whatsoever. So let *ego* find *ego*. This is the invitation of Ramana Maharshi. Let ego, instead of figuring everything else out, figure out itself. Let it find its own *self*.

Ego, of course, arises. It is not present when there is deep sleep. There is no one here in deep sleep. There is nobody, there is no mind, there is no universe, there is no me, there is no I-thought. This is the sweetness of sleep: I am *gone*.

Ego is a thought that arises. It is different from any other thought, because it is the source of all other thought. It arises in some *thing*. This that it arises in is yourself, the subject of

all your seeking: the core of ego. So, we set ego on the task of looking for itself, of sinking its attention into its own nature, of holding attention on itself only, of refusing to attend to any of the magnificent expressions that it spews out. This search for ego, by ego, is the essence of *self-investigation*.

Now you can see why, again, spiritual concepts have no place here, they are of no use in this investigation. We know that ego does not exist. So, would it not be better to watch my breath? Or to perform japa, or puja or worship? Well, you would actually be better doing nothing. You would actually be better absolutely *surrendered*. But *who* is to do that? Who is there to surrender itself *but* ego? And if you think *you* have surrendered, who is it that thinks this but ego?

If you hear nothing else, hear this: Ramana tells us that the purpose of your life is to discover the actuality of your identity. There is no purpose whatsoever for you other than that. And it is my experience that, truthfully, this *is* the way we spend our lives, although we usually do not know that we are doing that. Or we *deny* that we are doing that, because to admit it would be to admit that "I do not have a clue who I am talking about when I say I."

But it is my experience in this life — and as far as I can tell from those I have spoken with, it is the prominent experience of humanity — that we spend our lives trying to figure out who we are. And this confirms Ramana's insight that this is the *purpose* of our life. Ramana's suggestion is that we quit looking in all the wrong places and instead turn our attention directly

to our identity. To try with all of our heart to find our identity — knowing, obviously, that it is not to be found in thoughts, emotions, circumstance, body, etc. Then he tells us, and this is absolutely my experience, that the investigation itself *is* the realization that you seek with your heart.

What is obvious here is that there is absolutely nothing you can do to *attain* the realization of the truth of your being. You are *that*. You *are* that, it cannot be attained. Realization, enlightenment, the truth is unattainable. Not because it is unreachable by you, but because it is *you*. Absolutely you, *just as you are* — not some imagined, perfected, purified you. Exactly you. So it is absolutely unattainable. And the conscious *investigation* of that, the turning inward of attentiveness, the vigil at the heart of yourself, *is* realization. Great insights may spring up; pay them no mind. They will dissolve just as quickly as they appeared. Great terror may spring up; pay it no mind. It is of no more consequence than the insights. It is a reflection of yourself at play in this play.

I would like for you to maintain conversational silence during this day. I do not mean that as "Oh my God, I cannot speak." But honor the seriousness of the intent that has brought you here, and refuse to *discharge* whatever appears, whatever takes place within your heart, by seeking conversation. The purpose of the investigation is to force the mind to turn its attention inward, away from all of the techniques and the tactics that we have all adopted to *reassure* ourselves that we are. It is all okay, but it just has no place at the beginning of the investigation. Ramana tells us that this investigation takes huge effort, that it is not the

natural inclination of the mind. It is absolutely the reverse of the inclination of the mind, which is naturally inclined to go outward, to look among thoughts and memories and ideas and "Hi, how are you?" and all the stuff that we do. This is its natural inclination ;and it is okay. But if the investigation is to be truly begun, it has to be attended by the greatest effort to refuse the mind its natural inclination, to deny its natural desire to go outward, to compare what it seems to be finding with what it remembers to be, or what it is *supposed* be finding, for example. Ramana speaks of this as the greatest effort of this life. So, it is not easy. This is why the seriousness of your intention is so important. The strength of your intention is what is required.

In a recent meeting, I received a report from somebody who described a huge experience of paradise that had come to her in the very beginning of her attempts to turn her attention inward. A huge experience of the oneness of being. And then that experience disappeared, to be replaced by the experience of loss and disappointment. She has told me since that if that experience is not what she is looking for — because it is not — then she wants nothing to do with spiritual stuff. Well, that is okay. There is a huge disillusionment that is possible in this.

But I tell you, from my heart, that no experience whatsoever that comes to you, no matter how long standing — Ramana says, even if it lasts for a thousand years — no matter how huge, no *experience* can touch the *constant* conscious realization of the truth of your being. This has nothing to do with good experience or bad experience. Nothing whatsoever.

This conscious realization of the truth of your being is the investigation, it is the inward-turned mind. Begun with great effort, Ramana promises that if you persist, if you hold your attention inward always; if, when the inward attention breaks (as it will) and you find yourself digging around in the muck of comparison, you immediately pull your attention back inward (without justifying, explaining, understanding or doing anything at all about the movement outward), Ramana promises that, however long this effort seems to last, it will end in its disappearance, in its dissolution, in the permanent inwardness of the mind. He speaks of it like this: if you bring the mind's attention within the zone of the heart of your being, there is a magnetism there. There is a pull there that will catch you, and all your efforts will be finished.

I say that the mind falls in love with this search for itself; it falls in love in a way that is unimaginable. The mind then is so in love that it loses interest in all of its other affairs (and all of its other lovers) because this is the love affair it has wanted from the beginning and has not known where to find it.

I am speaking here to these egos, to these beliefs in individual existence, and I am announcing to you where is to be found your true desire. It is yourself. Everything you do that is not pertaining to this search for the actuality of yourself is a waste of time. Everything. And I tell you from my heart that everything that Ramana says is a fact. In this investigation, you will find what you have never imagined — it is a *love affair*. It is rich and deep and subtle, beyond all possibility of imagining in your

previous investigations. Papaji has said that the question "Who am I?" needs to be asked only once, if it is asked right. He is pointing exactly to what I am speaking of here. It may take you a while to get it right. But I promise you, in the moment that intuition strikes, it will have you. You will not be able to escape *then*.

The only force that has the power to look in the wrong places, to deny the truth of its being, is you. And that is done out of ignorance; it is just the way things are. But when you discover what it is you have really been looking for, you will not *want* to look anywhere else. You will have found your home. This is the cave of the heart. And it is to be found at the core of you. At the core of that horrifying, selfish me, the me-knot that seems to be the problem, that seems to be what we skitter away from. Look only there. Only there. Look until you find it.

I can give you a few hints: no one can tell you where to find yourself. Nobody can tell you, "Oh, look here, look there." *You* know where you are. Ramana speaks of the heart. Ramana points out that for those of us caught in the grip of what he calls the I-am-the-body-idea (the unspoken and unacknowledged belief that my identity is this body in some way), the heart (which is not the human heart or the emotional heart but the core, the source of ego, the source of all things whatsoever) most likely is identified as some location within the body. He uses the sutras and the scriptures to confirm his own experience: all say that *this* heart, if it is experienced within the body, is experienced on the right side of the chest. All say that if there is the experience of I-am-the-body, it is from this point in the body that fear, bliss, the world,

thought and, most fundamentally, "I" arise. And he tells us that if we must concentrate on something within the body, it is in here that this point is to be found. *(John points to the right side of his chest.)*

I am a little reluctant to speak about this, because when I first read about it, it seemed to me to be really stupid. But later, I found it to be quite useful; although you may not. I found it to be a useful reference. Most important is to hold your attention on something that you believe to be yourself. Since your self is everything whatsoever, it does not really matter! There is no way of determining, of defining, of pointing to some particular experience that is yourself. Most important is to find some location in the mind that seems to be you, and to hold your attention there — without regard to all the advaitic nonsense. I say nonsense because, in the context of one who is earnestly seeking for an end to their belief in the experience of separation, all of these *ideas* are nonsense. For the one who *believes* oneself to be the doer, the thinker, the sufferer, all the ideas that *deny* the existence of the doer, the doing, the done, the sufferer, the suffering, all of these ideas are useless.

You must start where you are. Make this effort, just for today. Find some thing that feels like "me" and hold onto it. And when your attention skitters away from it, hold onto it again. Ramana promises that a) the actual entry into the core of ego is the *dissolution* of ego, which does not mean that ego *disappears;* and b) if you try for nothing other than this, with all your heart, you will be successful, you will be unable to fail.

It feels lately that my self-inquiry is just a constant. And it usually starts with the ego looking at the ego, looking at the places in consciousness that have been abandoned and looking at the betrayal. What seems to happen is that there is no answer; there is a shift in what is looking. It starts out clearly — the identity, the personality, looking at itself. The deeper it looks, the more innocently, the more not-knowingly, the more openly; and the looker just becomes pure love and pure peace. And cannot be located anymore.

Well, this is as promised.

But it always starts with the identity looking, and then there is a noticing. I don't even know who is noticing; and that which is looking is something that is always looking.

Yes, that's right. Ramana says that the only difference between the jnani and the ajnani, between the realized mind and the ignorant mind, is point of view.

In the inquiry, the attention just subtly shifts... I used to do a written kind of inquiry. The writing started out very personal and, all of a sudden, I am not even writing "I" anymore. I feel like I disappear, I am everything, I am everybody, I am nobody and there is just love and peace.

This is the intuition. It is useful to see that what we speak of when we speak of the state of realization, is intuition,

uncapturable by any description. You find the world is still there, do you not?

It is still there, but it is experienced in such a completely different way.

Yes. That is the truth. The people with whom Ramana spoke, being in India and being in a vedantic context, were people who were pretty sharp on these different ideas of samadhi. In raja yoga, it is asserted that the ultimate samadhi is *nirvakalpa samadhi* which is, according to Ramana, the absence of objects, and this state is indistinguishable from deep sleep. Ramana said that nirvakalpa samadhi was okay, but the state you are looking for is *sahaja samadhi*, which is the natural state; and that is what you are reporting.

Three years ago, when I first had an experience of it, it was like I was drowning in silence. It was just huge. And now it feels normal.

It *is* normal. It is called the natural state for a reason. It truly is the natural state. It is nothing other than a shift in point of view. Before, everything was seen from the point of view of ego, a separate, needful identity. And things seen from the point of view of ego are appropriately seen in the way that they are seen in typical human life — suffering and misery, comparison and contention and "I want this and I don't want that." This is a perfectly appropriate perception — seen from the point of view of ego. There is nothing wrong with it. I am very happy that we are talking about this, because I really would like you to get this. It is

not that the point of view of ego is wrong. From the point of view of ego, it is perfectly appropriate. It is just *not you*. It is the point of view that you have adopted and accepted. From *your* point of view, ahhh, what a difference!

I think I am getting to understand what is meant by "there is nothing to do," but I would like to run it by you. It feels that in the self-inquiry itself, daring to look at the most hated, the most feared, the most disowned — without any intent to fix it or take away the pain... as the point of view changes, and all this love and compassion and understanding happens, it's like there is nothing to do. What I am starting to see is that it just soaks into all of what was hated and rejected. Something happens in what appears to be "over there" and that you have turned your back on; and in the experiencing of that, there is this knowing that it is all the same. It is all one thing. *I don't know if change is the right word, but it is almost like in the fairy tales when you kiss the beast and it turns into what it really is.*

It does not necessarily mean that it loses its *appearance* as a beast. That is the only thing that I would say about this.

Me too.

Here is the question: has the beast ever *not* been soaked in this?

No. The beast has experienced *itself as not being soaked in it; but it couldn't possibly not be.*

There, then, is the key to the realization that there is nothing to do.

Thank you. There had been still a misunderstanding that it cannot be there in its beastliness. *That's* what is. *That is its* expression.

That is its nature.

It does not have *to be something else. That is where the misunderstanding was. That is the fairy tale. That is the myth that it will be transformed into something else and will live happily ever after, instead of as play of consciousness. But it is* all *of it.*

Yes. And if it seems that there is something that has been done, then my suggestion is that you find out *for whom* this seeming is. You see the distinction here? I am not suggesting that you find out anything about the seeming itself. The seeming that something has been done, that something is changed, is *a seeming*. No problem with that. But when you find the *belief* in the seeming, then the question is, "For *whom* does this seem to be a change?" You do not need to eliminate the *seeming* of change.

Nothing *changes. It is just the eyes that are looking at it that see it in a different way.*

It is a different point of view. It is a shift in point of view.

But if I hadn't had this conversation with you, I would not have gotten that.

Then you are making good use of me. Any time it seems that something has been transformed by this realization, it is an invitation only to find out for whom is this seeming. There is no other investigation that is worthwhile. No matter how subtle and sweet it might be, the rest of it is more distraction, more outward moving. Who cares?

It is amazing to me, because I was still assuming that something was actually changing. But the only thing that was shifting is what *was seeing.*

Therefore the proper place for attention is not on what seems to be changing, but on what is seeing it. Gangaji promises us that there is no end, there is always more. That is Gangaji's promise. So if you find yourself saying, "Oh, I got it, everything is different," find out *who got it*.

I have done that a million times. And now I get it! That just clicked. The more the knots or the betrayer or what has been betrayed is looked at, the more subtle or deeper or bigger... It is so interesting, and it has begun with just looking at what seems the worst, the most painful, the most fearful!

That is a useful way. You know, you find your own way. That is why I was so reluctant to speak of the heart and its *sphurana*. Sphurana is the throbbing of the *vibration* of the heart energy. But you find your own way. Who else could possibly have any idea where you can be found, other than you? So if,

in your case, the direction of your attention has been in the beginning toward the hurtful or the hurt — then that is perfectly appropriate. It does not mean that is the case for everyone. You all know where you are. Really. How hard can it be to look for yourself?

In looking there, it seems the heart is here in my chest and it is really burning, and then at some point it does not have a location.

That's right. That is the truth. That is a confirming sign. And it can seem like a burning. That is the sphurana, the vibratory force of the heart that is spoken of in the sutras, in the Upanishads, in the Vedas. It is that *only* when seen from the point of view of me as the body. It is perfectly appropriate to look there, because that is the point of view from which you are looking for yourself. When the point of view shifts, the possibility of finding yourself in any location disappears. And it may reappear. This will happen over time.

Ramana speaks of the difference between gradual and immediate realization. He says that for realization, those ideas have no meaning. It is only for the one who is *seeking* realization that the idea of sudden or gradual has any meaning at all. It is okay. You must begin from where you *are*. It does no good whatsoever to say, "Oh, but I have no location. I am infinite consciousness. There is not two." None of that is helpful. What is helpful is to start honestly. Gangaji says, "Tell the truth." Start honestly from where you are — which is, for most everyone, from the point of view of "I am the body." Interestingly, Ramana tells

us, and he has to be speaking from his own experience, that for the jnani it is not that the I-am-the-body idea disappears; it is just that the *belief* in it disappears. It is seen from an entirely different point of view. It is not that anything disappears. It is not that suddenly you as this dynamo of conditioning, hatefulness and self-service becomes a saint, pure and clear. But it all loses its grip. The point of view that is *seen* through is the point of view that we start from. When the point of view shifts and disappears, it does not mean that the dynamo changes its nature, that the scorpion changes its nature: so what? Who are *you*? Find yourself. There is nothing else for you to do. You are not in this life to become a saint. You are in this life to find yourself. Give it all up.

I am really happy to be here with you. Find yourself.

Om Shanti.

Surrender and Investigation

Ramana said that the only thing, absolutely the only thing that is worthwhile to know and to remember is that there is nothing but the self. There is nothing but self. All things, all thoughts, all emotions, all doing, all not-doing, all surrender, all arrogance, all ignorance, all clarity, all things whatsoever are self. According to Ramana, this is the only piece of knowledge that you ever need in this quest. I got a note from somebody advising me that the "sat" in the word satsang is most often translated into English as "truth". I had called it "association with self." "Association with truth" is the most common rendering of the Sanskrit word "satsang." Well, I confess: I did that on purpose.

One of the things that really appealed to me about Gangaji, and I am sure it is one of the things that appeals to most everyone about her, is that she is such an *ordinary* woman. Really, apart from her magnificence, she is an American woman, with little interest in the intricacies of spiritual ideas and concepts. In fact, with considerable *impatience* with spiritual ideas and concepts. So, in this constant meeting with her, I felt a permission to discard all of the sticky stuff about spiritual expression. The only spiritual practice I have experience with is Buddhism, and I have to tell you that the Buddhists hate the word "Self." I was told by a good friend of mine, who was one of my Buddhist teachers in prison, that the only thing that he really took exception to in the whole business of Ramana Maharshi was the harping on Self. If he could do away with that word, everything else would be okay.

I have to say that I did not like that word either. It struck me as being a kind of Hindu thing. Self, always with a capital S. So, for a long time, I steadfastly refused to use that word, especially in satsang. I thought it kind of stunk a little bit. This is a good example of the uselessness of opinions. Ramana tells us that the only thing that we need to know is that there is nothing *other* than self. In this constant meeting with Ramana, in this perpetual investigation, I have come to see that self actually is the perfect word as long as it does not have a capital S. It is actually the perfect word for what you are looking for.

I have no idea what the word *atman* felt like in Sanskrit. Probably no one has any idea what this word felt like in Sanskrit, it being a dead language that, in so far as I know, no one speaks anymore. But I know what the word "self" feels like in English. I know what it refers to. I know the experience, the reality that it refers to. And this is what we are speaking of. It is not your "higher Self", although it may well be called that. It is not Truth as an object, although it may well be called that too. This that we are seeking in this investigation is precisely the ordinary, mundane, everyday, never-been-absent sense of self that *you* know. So I have deliberately spoken of satsang as "association with self" because, in my view and in my experience, this describes precisely what satsang is. It is an association with yourself.

Gangaji says, "I am your self." She says it all the time. And when I first heard that, I took it to mean: "She is my self as I ought to be," she is the goal. Her state, her realization, her magnificence is the goal. Well, I see now that what she is speaking

of is the literal truth. *I* say to you, "I am your self," and I *am* your self: what else could I be? If I say to you, "I am your self", I don't mean Self with a capital S. This *form* — that appears in your consciousness, urging you to find yourself — *is* yourself. All things whatsoever, without any exception, are yourself; the ordinary, simple, everyday, mundane selfness that you are.

This reality of yourself is the key. It is not something that changes. I am sitting here in this chair, I am looking at all of you — *all* aspects of my own self. And, so far as I can tell, this one who is sitting here is exactly the same as the three-year-old boy that once was called by this name. Nothing whatsoever has changed about myself. The body has changed, the mind has changed. The circumstances have changed, and continue to do so. But I, by which I mean my self, have not changed at all. Just like *your* self. Not because your self is "similar" to my self, but because it is the *same* self. This is your self also. (*John points to himself*) It appears *in* you, it disappears in you. And you cannot find it by looking *at* this rose. You can find it only by looking at the *seer* of the rose, the perceiver of the rose, the lover or hater of the rose. And what is discovered *there* is nothing new.

Once the intuition, the essential permanent conscious realization of your actual identity is present, the magnificence of it is unspeakable. The freedom of it is beyond any possibility of speaking about it. That is why it is probably unavoidable that when we are in spiritual circles and in spiritual contexts, we get all "Aahhhhh... Self..." and this is okay. It is actually appropriate. The realization is huge. But it is the realization of something that

is so absolutely ordinary. So absolutely, permanently *present*. So absolutely simple, that the highfalutin ideas about it are really just gilding the lily — and a waste of time!

Who are you? Nothing else is of any importance. Who are you, really? What do I speak of when I utter the word "I"? What speaks "I"? I found it helpful in the beginning to say "I" again and again, and try to catch the spot from whence this word appears. Anything helps, that is done with the intention of truly finding yourself. It is amazing that it should seem so difficult. It is your self. *Just like you are*. Ramana says there are only two methods for obtaining this realization. One is self-investigation, and the other is self-surrender. Self-investigation you can do; self-surrender is undoable. If *you* could surrender, you would have done so already.

*You just confused me by saying "*I *am* your *self" and "all this is* my*self". It kind of makes me want to go into a trance. Up to that point, I followed you and I can confirm what you were saying from my own experience.*

When you are speaking about me, what is it that you are speaking about? What are you referring to?

My *experience of* you*, I suppose.*

Where does that experience appear?

In me.

The sun and the moon and the stars, where do they appear?!

But that is not the mystical experience of "Everything is One."

Ah, it is not the mystical experience of "Everything is One!" The only difference between the *mystical* experience that everything is one and the experience that everything is *you*, is point of view. I tell you that the mystical experience that all is one is precisely your experience. Why you persist in denying it to be so is a mystery. *That* is the mystery!

This is really excellent. This is really important. This is what I am telling you: your experience, just as it is, *is* the experience of "all is one self." The mystery is why you say it is not.

I guess I feel more intimate with my thoughts, feelings, my awareness, my body, than I do with objects.

So your thoughts, your emotions, your feelings, your body — they are not objects? Are they not objects in your *consciousness*?

Yes.

This is not theoretical. This is your actual experience...

This is true.

So, where is the distinction, other than the feeling of "more intimate?" Perhaps this experience that you call "feeling a more intimate relationship," in Ramana's parlance, goes by the name I-am-the-body idea. This gives you a choice: you can choose to attend to this feeling of "more intimate with my thoughts,

my emotions, my body and so forth;" or, if you look and see for whom this feeling of intimacy appears, it will possibly reveal itself to be an *object* in consciousness. Are you following me?

Yes. And that has been my experience, before you started talking about Ramana — that who I think I am is an object in my consciousness. I can't know what your *experience was like with Gangaji. But when you started talking about Ramana and about putting the attention on the ego, on that feeling of "I," this is very blissful, very opening, it reveals something else.*

The experience that you have, that "my thoughts, my body, my emotions are of a different order than the sun, the moon, the stars and the appearance of John Sherman in consciousness," this experience itself points to the experiencer. The feeling of intimacy that saturates these thoughts, the body, the emotions, and makes them feel special, is also a thought. It is an experience. This experience, by whom is it experienced?

There is the endless temptation to move attention into the objects of thought. And it becomes more and more subtle, the closer you come to the heart. The mind has seen through those, "I get it, what I think I am is an object in consciousness." The capacity of the mind to trick itself with new levels and layers of subtleties is endless, so that one is able to think that the apparent *change* is something that is of some importance. That is understandable. And you think that this feeling of intimacy is something special. That is understandable, too. Do not stop there. Find out *for whom* this apparent difference is. *That* is yourself.

The value of Ramana's assertion that everything is your self, and the value of his insistence that this is all you need to know, is that of a *reminder*. In the heat of the subtle shifting of the mind and the subtle ways it can distract itself from what it really wants to do, which is to find itself, the trance can be broken. Confusion is an example of that. Confusion is a breaking of that. It is not to be rejected, it is a confirming sign.

In the tradition in which Ramana appears, whatever name it goes by, they speak of the "sheaths," the "coverings of the Atman." You are speaking about the belief that comes from the investigation into the question "Who am I?" The final sheath, the final obstacle, the final obscuration goes by the name of *anandamaya-kosha* or the sheath of bliss. This is the final obscuration and often for many, it is a sticking point. This woman that I spoke of this morning was drowned, drenched in the bliss of being, as a consequence of her investigation. That bliss is an *experience* — for whom is this experience? The experience of bliss that you know from investigation is replaced by the experience of confusion at being confronted with something that does not quite fit in to what your mind has decided, perhaps silently, to be that. Therefore, if the bliss that you experience disappears and is replaced by confusion, then that is not what you are looking for. If it goes, it is not what you are looking for. What you are looking for is yourself, which has never changed, and never will change. You know this. Here, nothing is to be found that changes. Here, birth and death are not to be found. So don't stop. This is the beauty of the *vichara*, the investigation. This is the magnificence of it. Everything is your teacher: every thought,

every feeling, every moment of bliss, every moment of confusion is now pointing you straight back to yourself. If only you will reverse the direction of your *attention* and follow it back to its source. All of it is the guru on the outside, pushing you to the guru on the inside, pulling you. Every thought, every confusion, every mistake, every wrongness, every rightness, *everything* pointing : "There, there."

We are not here for bliss. Bliss is great, but it comes and goes. The bliss that you *are* is permanent. The bliss that you are is that in which bliss and agony *alike* play. It is all in your intention. It is all in what you want. If you want bliss, the experience of bliss, that's easy. Really, that's easy. There are many, many teachers wandering the land with big shakti who will give you that. And if you cannot find one of those, there is always Ecstasy or some other chemical substance. I tell you, bliss is not what you are looking for.

We are all, throughout our entire lives, looking, trying to find "Who am I?" That is all we are doing here in this life, in these bodies, trying to figure out who we are. So finally in this meeting with Ramana, that quest becomes *conscious*. Now, finally, the opportunity has appeared in your life to make this quest — that has been your quest from the moment you were born — conscious, direct, unmediated. Who am I? For whom is this bliss? For whom is this confusion? Who am I? Find yourself!

A few minutes ago, you said that Ramana had said that the only thing to do was to do the investigation, and that surrender was not doable. I guess I need to sort that out, because words like

"vigilance" have always been confusing to me; but "surrender" is what I have really heard...

Before you can surrender, you have to first surrender the surrenderer.

Sometimes though, like now, looking at thought or asking myself, "Who am I?", it feels *like surrender.*

It is the same thing. The investigation is the path to surrender. In the investigation, you are in fact surrendering the surrenderer. Ramana says, and I agree wholeheartedly, that everyone thinks, when they hear that there are two choices, investigation and surrender, that surrender is the easiest. But that is only because they don't understand how absolute is the surrender that is required.

Surrender has been very hard for me, just like vigilance. *It is very difficult. What does that mean? Surrender has been hard, too. But it feels like surrender, when I am asking the question.*

That is a confirming sign. The *end* is the same. Ramana puts it this way: if you know God, you surrender. If you know God, you love God. You cannot love God and surrender, unless you *know* God. The path to know God is *self-investigation*. When the investigation takes hold of you, you will happily give all. You cannot help but do that. You can't do other. If, however, you say, "Okay, I get it. I have to surrender. Okay, I surrender: here are my clothes, here is my money, here is my job, here is my wife, here is my house. I am going to go sit in the forest. I surrender.

I surrender." *Who* surrenders? Papaji says to that foolishness, "First renounce the renouncer." You are right: this investigation ends in surrender. It *begins* in the willingness to surrender, in the willingness that appears within the ego-mind to find out, once and for all, what is the truth of my identity. That is as much surrender as you are capable of. And that is huge. That is really huge. Do you see how huge that is? The recognition, "I don't know what in the world I am talking about, when I say "I." I give up. I am going to find out." That is all the surrender that is needed. That is intention.

On the same subject, I guess I am still stuck on your saying that it is impossible to surrender, or to take the bhakti path; because I know someone who seems to live in total surrender, and he has been through this shift in consciousness. He says, "If you can want God's will more than your own, then you will always be content — because everything that happens is God's will."

I absolutely agree with that.

So, why did you say it was impossible ...

I cannot speak to him because he is not here today. I can speak to you and ask you why *you* haven't surrendered to that level? What stops you?

Probably the interest of the flesh, of the body. Other interests. I would love to emulate him ...

But it really is pointless to speak about someone else's experience. It is not useful. What are *you* interested in?

I am interested in surrender.

And have you succeeded?

Not yet.

And who is it that hasn't succeeded?

Myself. Me. The "I" feeling.

Where is that to be found? Is it possible for you, right now, to renounce your *efforts* to surrender — and to emulate this self-surrendered one — and instead attend only to that "I"?

I think it could be possible; but I still question what you are saying, that the other path is impossible.

Well, forget I said it then. I take it back!

I don't want you to take it back. If that is what you teach, that is what you teach.

I actually teach nothing. My only hope here is to point you to yourself. And the reason I say it is impossible for anyone to surrender, and I am not the only one who says this, is because I cannot imagine who there could be who could perform such an act. I cannot find anyone who can possibly surrender.

Yes. I hear you. I hear you.

And I suggest to you, and to all, that the bhakti path, the path of surrender, is extremely seductive. It seems very easy. Looked at from outside, it seems very easy. What I suggest to you is that this surrender that you seek can be immediately a reality in the determination only to find yourself; because there is no one for you to surrender *to*, other than your *self*. If there is God, it is yourself. The seeking after yourself *truly* is the seeking after God. And surrender is not something that *you* do, even in the investigation. What the investigation does is finish you.

And it brings *you to surrender? Is that what you are saying?*

It eliminates the *surrenderer*. This is the *goal* of the bhakti path.

Well, the surrender of the surrenderer would be the goal.

That is the elimination of the surrenderer, is it not?

I guess we are agreeing then.

I think we are agreeing. The bhakti path is the elimination of the surrenderer, as is the investigation. The only distinction between the two is that the path of investigation is done consciously by the ego. This is the only distinction.

I recall reading one of the greatest bhaktis, Saint John of the Cross. He is really one of the greatest bhaktis. In reading *The Dark Night of the Soul*, I had no idea where it was going.

But the *final* realization of Saint John was not the eternal life of the soul, but the *annihilation* of the soul, the annihilation of the surrenderer, the annihilation of the devotee and the *object* of devotion. This is exactly what is offered in the investigation. Ramana says they are the same. They have the same outcome.

Thank you for your clarification. I understand.

You are very welcome.

It has been a week since your previous satsang and I discovered *something that Sunday.*

Yes, I remember you.

You told me to keep my attention inside. The first thing that I found is that it is extremely difficult.

Yes, it is. In the beginning, it is very difficult.

I found it exhausting. It even makes me physically sleepy because I feel like I have to use all of my energy to keep my attention there. So it is very good to hear this from you, because I thought there was something wrong with me!

It is the hardest thing you will ever do, in the beginning. The promise is that if you maintain the effort, the effort will

disappear. And that is my promise as well. But it is the hardest thing you will ever do. It goes against everything.

I didn't know if I was doing it well, just the turning of my attention to a place that physically seems to be the back of my head, the place where all thoughts come from.

Yes, that is fine.

I feel very neutral when I do that. There is only this clarity, and everything is crystal clear. It is like my glasses had been dirty and all of a sudden I cleaned them. There is a feeling of spaciousness; it is as if my body becomes transparent. It is there, it is breathing, and it is present. Everything is present but there is a lightness associated with the "me;" it's like the "me" is a bubble. My emotions are very neutral. I was expecting huge feelings of love, or huge feelings of compassion; but it is very detached, very neutral; just seeing everything with absolute clarity.

What more could you want? It may be that huge emotions will come. Maybe not. No one can tell. These matters are entirely according to the predispositions of the individual. It may be that huge experiences will come, good things *and* bad. Maybe not. Your job is to keep attention inward, regardless of the emotion or the lack of it. The confirming sign is this dispassion, which is not disassociation. Just equanimity. This is your natural state.

All of my life, I have been searching for this and I had the concept that it would be something really different, really special. But it is so simple, so ordinary!

Yes! Thank you. I am very happy with that report. This is really interesting, because this is exactly what I am speaking of when I talk about the fact that we all have the *idea* that we know what we are looking for. We are looking for some big, explosive change. Well, big explosive changes are changeable. They come and they go.

It is not that I am telling you what you should be doing, such as "what you ought to be doing is trying to find yourself." This is actually what we have all been doing all our lives. What has changed is that we have become conscious of that, and now we are able to do it more intelligently. I am very happy to hear from you. You *cannot* do it wrong. Do you get that? You cannot do it wrong. Your intention is all that matters. There is nothing more to it. If your intention is absolutely "I am going to find myself;" you cannot do that wrong. Really. If your intention is "I am going to look within, instead of without," you cannot do it wrong. It is not possible.

I feel like I am in the mountains of Tibet. I have never been there but I feel like that, just being in this rarefied atmosphere here in Temescal Canyon Park and in the company of you all. When we took a break at lunchtime, I was walking around a little bit and it's just incredibly beautiful here. My experience of turning back inward to reverse the flow is, "Oh God, not again." I feel like paying attention itself is really boring. That is a very common experience for

me that has happened today and all my life. And the other is this sort of sleepiness. Turning inward, there is a short-circuit that happens. Looking at what*? It sort of cancels itself out, and I either get sleepy — or I get extremely clear.*

That is interesting, because those are the two outcomes that are very commonly reported. The sleepiness is called *manolaya*, which is the kind of calming of the mind, the dumbing down, the deadness. It is often mistaken to be the state that is sought, because there is nothing happening. There is a sleepiness and a disappearance of concern. The other state, which is the sahaja samadhi, is the state that she described, which is clarity and dispassion. But dispassion is not like what dispassion sounds like. It is *all* your self.

It is not disconnected.

Yes, not disconnected. In the appearance of this manolaya, the possibility then and there is to find out "for whom is this occurring?"

In the second one, or both?

The first one. In the second one, one's attention is permanently on the self, *permanently* inward. A condition in which nothing "inward" nor "outward" can be found. Permanently withdrawn, *relaxed* — that is sahaja samadhi. Its feeling is the feeling of clarity and dispassion and everything is perfectly obvious. So, the appearance of this manolaya is actually

a confirming sign of the investigation. It is a good sign. It is just not one to be taken seriously. It is an invitation to go deeper and to find out for whom this deadness appears. In what does it *appear*? From whence does it come?

Continue the investigation. And even in the state of clarity and dispassion, the vigilance that Gangaji speaks of is required. It is the ceaseless inward attention, the ceaseless willingness to refrain from getting caught up in the old infatuations of the "meaning" of the deadness, the "meaning" of the sleepiness, the "meaning" of the clarity, the "meaning" of the dispassion. You know, it is the outgoing mind that looks for meaning in those things. The invitation is to refuse that. It has done you no good. Never, at any time, has it been useful to you. It just leads to more questions, more confusion, more subtlety, more explanations. Just stop. This is what is meant by "stop." Stopping is to turn inward. I have said before in my meetings, I have suggested to everyone, that you did not start the thought, therefore *you* cannot stop it. And, at a certain stage, this is useful to help you see that thought seems to appear independently of the perceiver of the thought. But I tell you now that it is absolutely possible to stop thought. Thought is stopped when its origin is investigated. And I tell you also that everything whatsoever *is* thought. Everything. So that, in any experience, the investigation of the origin of the experience destroys it as an experience, as a separate object.

I have tried to find out where thought comes from. I don't know where thought comes from; I only know it doesn't come from me because, if it came from me, I would know what I am going to think about in five minutes.

Yes, and this is true enough. It comes from the thinker.

So you are saying it does *come from one of my levels?*

It comes from the thinker, the ego, which is the source of thought. This is why it is useful to try to catch thought as it appears. If you are looking for a thought to appear, and instead of following it on its course and its ramifications, your attention is turned back to the point from which it appears, your attention is on the source of thought itself.

That doesn't make sense to me. For example, all of a sudden I'll see I'm thinking about Tom Cruise. He means nothing to me. But my mind is generating thoughts about Tom Cruise.

What is it that we are referring to when we say "my mind"? *This* is the question. You have just said that something is generating these thoughts. There is the experience of some dynamo, some engine churning out thoughts. That is what I want you to attend to.

Okay. It's the thing which comes up with all those thoughts.

Right, exactly. The thing which turns out those thoughts, that is the thinker. It is an aspect of ego. One of the most

liberating aspects of Buddhist practice that I know is the discovery that thoughts are *objects*, that they are not *me*. They appear apparently unbidden. They certainly do not have anything to do with me. Before this discovery, the ordinary assumption is, "I am my thoughts." And there is a great scurrying and effort to change or do something about that, which proves, of course, to be futile. The actuality is that there is the experience of something thinking those thoughts. Now, attention can be placed on that which is turning out those thoughts, and be held there, without regard to the *outcome* of it — there is no outcome to it. It is just that *that* is where attention belongs, in the quest to determine your actual identity; because for most of this life, for most of us, the *thinker* has been the sense of who I am. So attend to that. Hold that.

Thank you.

I have a question about thought. What if you have a scary thought, such as in a situation where you can't go back to the origin of it and you just have to stop the thought?

I don't know. This is abstract.

I have a difficult time with flying. I don't like to be trapped. I want to be able to get out. And I can't keep drugging myself, because I have to be able to work when I get off the plane.

The only way to stop that thought is to not attend to the thought and, by all means, not to try to divert your attention to some other thought; instead, follow that thought back to its source. See from whence it comes. Once you are strapped into that coffin, there is nothing you can do about it anyway. Once that thing leaves the runway, you are trapped. There is nothing you can do. If that airplane is going to go down, it is going to go down. No amount of distracting yourself from the fear, and no amount of trying to do something about it, will help you. In that moment, in the really quite mature recognition that it is too late to do anything ("I should never have gotten on this airplane, but it is too late now."), there is the opportunity to see that fear itself is a huge gift of grace, because it is so intense. I know how intense it can be. I have been in gunfights with the police. That fear itself, which is so intense, is a gift of grace. Because of its intensity, it isn't done away with so easily. So, look for where it comes from. You look for who experiences it. You look for yourself. You put yourself in a situation where there is nothing you can do, so you might as well *use* it.

I have been living a life of just delight for the last few months, utter delight. Very ordinary, but very delightful. And I see myself going through these highs and getting caught up, and always being able to fall back into that which is and which never changes. As I listened to you, my system got kind of jarred. As I was sitting here waiting for you to begin speaking, I was asking myself, Who am I? Who is this?, as you

were instructing us to do. And I met such resistance, waves of no, no, no, no, and waves of resistance, and waves of fear. I was taken aback.

Didn't expect that, did you?

No, I didn't. And then what happened was, Oh my God, there is no place to land. There is no place that is ever going to be it. *It is always something* more. *But then, I heard you say that, eventually, there comes a place where you* live *from that all the time. I am not saying it quite right; obviously I am not* there.

You are not saying it quite right, because you *already* live from that all the time. There comes a point when the effort of it disappears. When the effort to keep vigil dissolves, and the vigil is your ordinary state of consciousness.

I even had a taste of that, because I understood what Gangaji meant when she said "the vigil." It is nothing like what you think it is. It is not work. It's just the pure delight of beingness in that state.

Yes, it is the love affair with yourself. When you find the absolute love of your life, that which is everything you ever wanted, why would you ever want to leave? That is what it is. And it is a great confirming sign. Just as I have said, that is not always the case. In some cases, it is very simple and there is not a lot of emotional storm and thunder; but in other cases, it is not. In the case of this person, there was huge fear and terror and anger and confusion and railing about of emotions. In all cases whatsoever, it is absolutely possible for you to attend only to yourself. It is absolutely possible for you to refrain from following any

emotional uprising and, instead, to keep your attention on *that*, on the one for whom this emotion appears. This *too* is yourself. What often happens, in the investigation, is that it is like throwing open the cell doors to the penitentiary. All of the horror, all the bad guys with teardrops tattooed on their cheeks, come rushing out.

I am very happy to hear this. I am always happy to hear of the shaking. I am happy to hear the report of clarity and peace and freedom; and I am also really happy to hear of shaking, because what is being asked of you, what you are asking of yourself in this investigation, is to put everything on the line. Everything. "I do not know what in the world I am talking about when I say *I*. Let me find that out." Everything is on the line then. So the shaking is not surprising.

When I went to my first retreat with Gangaji, I listened to her and I said, "Oh my God, I have to give up everything I ever thought I knew about anything." I had invested a lot of years, as most of us have, in developing my concept of what spirituality was all about. And I wrestled with my thoughts that night. I wanted to run away. And it is almost like the same experience in here. In this space that I was in, it is like, "Oh my God, I have to give up everything I thought this *was." And in that, I also find freedom; because it is in the conceptualization of things, and what you think it all is, that you are trapped.*

This is why one of Papaji's most profound utterances is "non-abidance in the mind anywhere." Non-abidance in the mind anywhere. And when you take that with the obvious reality that all

is *mind*, where does that leave you to stand? Where is there a place to stand? *There is no place to stand*. There is no reference point.

Ramana talked about this a lot — all that occurs is a shift in point of view. But really, the new point of view is not a *point* of view. It has no place to stand. It has no position. I am convinced, in my own experience, that the whole phenomenon of misidentification, about which billions of words in hundreds of languages have been written, is merely the determination to cling to a particular point of view. That's it. That is all it is. Well, there is no place to stand. Only find yourself.

You are such a huge gift. Thank you.

I have a question, which may seem trivial, but it will not get out of my head.

It is okay. It is not trivial.

We have to make decisions.

Right now? Make a decision right now.

I was thinking about an earlier decision.

The decision that counts is the decision to find yourself, at all costs. I can reassure you, I can tell you that the decision-making that makes this life run will quite happily take place, no

matter whether you are looking for yourself or not. The only *difference* is that, as long as you are persuaded that "you" are the decider, you will suffer. And as long as you think yourself to *be* the decider, the only question worth asking is "Who am I?" Where is this decider to be found?

But I still have to make a decision.

Look and see. Decisions are made. Truthfully, decisions are made and continue to be made. I mean, I am here, am I not? Didn't I have a choice this morning? Couldn't I have just left all of you on your own and gone to the beach?

The second part of my question is about demons. I don't like demons. They don't want me to let them out of their cage.

This is the hard fact of it. If you are determined to keep them in your cage, then I would advise you not even to think about trying to find out who you are.

But they cause me trouble anyway.

Then let them out.

I have a feeling that if I leave them in their cage, they are just going to get bigger.

I think that is an appropriate insight. Find yourself!

Attention seems to be the same as identity. That is just amazing!

That is a useful insight. Therefore, attention should be placed on the *source* of attention.

Because if you are putting your attention on *anything, then you are actually putting your identity on it.*

Is that your experience as well, that attention is your identity?

Yes.

Then, that is where attention belongs.

I am sure there are a lot of implications to it. Where do you find corroboration with that, except for yourself?

That is the only place. And it *may* be that others will also discover that the direction where the self is to be found is at the source of attention. But that is not necessarily the case for all. There is no teaching here. The teaching is to find yourself. And if it occurs to you, in the search for yourself, that "attention is my self, my identity," that is the satguru calling you home, in the direction from whence attention comes. But for others, it could be an entirely different experience.

Ramana tells us that the only thing you have to remember is that everything is yourself. It may be that you find a sense of

yourself in some *other* experience, which is not to say that it is not attention. It is just to say that each one, according to their own predisposition, finds some particular direction home, some particular pointer home. Let it be the heart chakra; let it be the back of the head where thoughts seem to appear; let it be your big toe. If it is your absolute experience that that is the knot of identity, the source of your identity, and you hold your attention there ceaselessly without fail, you cannot be wrong.

I can always sense that investment of attention is an investment of identity. Not that that has taken me all the way home. But it has been a nice companion on the way.

I have some news for you: you have no companions on this journey. I am not disagreeing with you, I am not arguing with you, but I am glad you said that. If there is *nothing but* yourself, then you are alone. You are alone. Alone. Papaji says two cannot go there together. I can listen and see if your reports conform to my own experience. I cannot tell you where you can find yourself, or where you can't.

There is something else: the mind has a heart, just like everything else does. That is the same heart as the heart of the true self.

Yes. In fact, Ramana tells us that ego is indistinguishable from self. This is the reason that he encourages us to direct our inquiry toward ego, rather than self. It is because ego is the most direct doorway into the self; it is indistinguishable from self — which is why we are confused. That realization is present in the

Jewish mystical practice, the Kabbala. I read once a Kabbala text in which the ego is spoken of as the *absolute perfect mirror*. This is the reason why we get confused, because it feels like self. It is indistinguishable from self. This is one of the things that makes the I-thought so unique among thoughts, because it is exactly like yourself. And everything whatsoever is related to it — to self, to me.

The main significance of that for me is not that the mind is separate from the heart, and that the mind is having to drop into the heart, but that they are actually both the same.

There is truly no distinction. A discussion of the mind dropping into the heart is only for the good of the one who is seeking to do away with his own suffering. It is only a teaching story, and there is no truth to it. But this is certainly the experience of all who feel separate. Regardless of whether we are talking about the Vedantic heart, or some other concept of heart, the experience is that "I am separate from the source. I am separate from the heart. I am separate from God." That is the experience. It does no good to scold you and say that it is not the truth, that there is no separation. That is just one more thing to suffer about, to try to make real. That is the reason why all these sutras and texts and teachings take the form they do; because they take form from the point of view of the one who is seeking liberation. And it is the experience of the one who is seeking liberation that he or she is separate from the source, separate from God. Therefore, they urge you to *find* the source, to find self, to find the heart. And the reason that this heart chakra is identified is because it is the experience of so many. It is so uniformly the

experience of people who are convinced that they are the body — that there is this center of energy, this dynamo of energy — that it has proven useful to turn your attention there, rather than to the outgoing mind. But there is no truth to it. What we are speaking of is *experience* only, not reality. *Reality* is that there is nothing but yourself. Nothing. You are the source of all. There is no "localization" to you.

The significance of that might be that the origin of the mind is the heart also.

Yes, that is right. That is where it comes from. That is where it arises from. That is where the I-thought first comes from. In this tradition, the I-thought is the source of the *mind*. It is the mind and the seed.

So it is the same identity. And that is nice to know.

Yes. If I speak to you, and I tell you to find yourself, obviously I am speaking nonsense. How can you *lose* yourself? And yet, I know the experience of not knowing myself. So I speak to you like that. What good would it be for me to tell you that all is one, that nothing is? Is that helpful? I don't think so. Ramana tells us, in speaking of the distinction between the real and the unreal, "Here is how you tell the difference between the real and the unreal: everything that is *seen* is unreal." So, look for the *real*. Find yourself, which has never been seen and has never been absent. Never, not for a nanosecond. So, in this dream of being, in this dream of me and you, attend not to me, attend to yourself. Find from whence this dream arises. Find yourself. Thank you.

There Is No Place to Stand

When I was in prison, after meeting Gangaji (and after getting to know Ramana, who really finally introduced me to Gangaji) I was at the topmost level of prestige. I had been an armed bank robber, and that is pretty much the top of the heap. I was *something* in prison! In the aftermath of my meeting Gangaji and Ramana, the people who had previously known me and what I was like, were, for the most part, flabbergasted. They could not fit what had happened within me into any of their ideas of what I was like and what I had been doing. It did not fit into any of the ordinary ways by which convicts dismiss those who stray from the straight and narrow: I did not fit into anything. As a consequence of this, I found myself in satsang just about all the time — challenged, debated. One of the groups that was most interested in destroying what they perceived to be my heretical view of things was the Christians. The Christians in prison are really, really Christian! I remember having a discussion with a group of Christians in prison about the will of God. At one point, they were indignant and said, "Well, how do *you* know what the will of God is?" And I said, "Look around you. How can you miss it?"

I wanted to say something about attention, identity and insight. I am actually very familiar with the insight that attention is identity. It is no different from what Gangaji suggests to us when she asks us, "Where is your attention?" Because it is true that it is the *placing* of attention that becomes the act of identification. It is the relaxation, the refusal to focus attention on

this or that, that is the *natural* state: clarity and dispassion. The thing about insight, however, is that insight is a two-edged sword. It spontaneously appears and it can be very useful. For the one to whom the insight appears, it can be, "Ah, I never suspected that!" All insights, however, are limited and therefore are not descriptive of the real. As an insight occurs, the *invitation* (in the instant that it appears, the moment that it penetrates consciousness) is to dismiss it, to let it go. No insight is the truth. Insights are gifts of grace that are very sweet and very powerful, and they can be extremely powerful in cutting through previously-held misunderstandings. But as soon as it does its job, it's history.

I have to tell you that when I speak to you of these things, of the sweetness of realization, I speak to you from my own experience. When I speak to you of the perversity of the mind's willingness to be tricked by its own productions, I *also* speak to you from my own experience — I do not speak theoretically. And insights that are cherished as things in themselves become luggage in the bag of bones that Papaji advises us not to carry around. Love whatever appears and let it go. It has done its job in the moment of its appearance and after that it is a burden. It is just something to carry around and to compare present experience with, so it is of no use to you.

We also spoke of dispassion. From time to time in my meetings, I used to point out the fact that unconditional love doesn't care and, when someone had not heard that before, it often produced a kind of shaking. Well, most everybody who has been with me now has heard me say that, so I don't say it

any more. But this dispassion that we spoke of is precisely that unconditional love that doesn't care. It doesn't make it any less *love*. It is the hugest love. It is the love that allows all to be *as it is*. It is the light in which saint and sinner alike live and move and have their being. It has gotten this name "dispassion" attached to it in order to distinguish it from the *clinging* love that we are most familiar with in human activity. But this dispassion that we speak of is love *without condition*. It is love that truly cares not what shines in its light.

How perfect that it is my turn now because I wanted to talk to you about an insight I had about insight. John, all I can say is that your past experience as a bomber serves you well! When you spin those cruise missiles, all my beautiful cherished insights that I try to hold on to and put on a pedestal are blasted into thin air!

Good. That is good use of me.

Just keep aiming those missiles! In our conversation, I realized that even in the self-inquiry, even in wanting the truth, I keep wanting to go, "Oh, now I understand it. Now I've got it," and I try to hold on to that. And every time I speak to you, you just blast that away. And I realize that I thought there was some security *in that.*

Yes, of course. That is the reason we cling to that, because we think there is security in it.

What you just said was the insight that I had in the moment, when you were just present and that insight was there cutting through; it's like a lightning bolt from God. It is just Grace in the moment, and what is being perceived in the moment. But what is being perceived is just...

... just what is being perceived.

It does not mean anything in the next moment.

That's right.

I have been stubbornly, arrogantly holding on, wanting to know something, wanting to be the one who understands, who knows something...

Well, stop that then!

I have to tell you the appreciation that I feel for you... Sometimes when it first happens, I feel really shut down. But then, after I get a few breaths, I go, "Thank God you keep aiming those missiles." Thank you so much.

You are very welcome. This is good use of me. Throwing out these targets is good use of me! Find yourself. That is the only task you have. How hard can that be?

*When you were in Irvine, I heard you speak about self-investigation for the first time, and it was truly remarkable. It has been a remarkable two weeks for me. One thing that really struck me was that I was driving my car and I had the thought, "*Who *wants to turn on the radio?" But the next thought was, "*Who *is aware of asking these questions?"*

That is the next step. Who is asking these questions? Ramana tells us, and it is my experience, that the investigation stops the mind. This is really interesting to see. I once read a letter that someone wrote to Gangaji, in which the writer claimed that it is impossible to stop the mind. And Gangaji wrote back to her and said, "It is absolutely possible to stop the mind, but the result is not a stopped mind." Similarly, it is absolutely possible to destroy the ego, but the result is not the absence of ego. The investigation will stop the mind. If what results from that is blankness, it is the manolaya. If what results from that is the clarity and the dispassion, the mind is not gone; the objects are present as they always were. The *thoughts* are present as they always were. But the *mind*, truly, is dead.

Ramana tells us that investigation *is* realization. I said this morning, I will say it again, I will probably say it 15 million times before I die: the investigation has no goal. The investigation itself *is* what you have always wanted. And every second spent with the mind inward-turned on its own source is a second spent consciously realized. If it is persisted in, gradually the time spent with the mind going outward diminishes. And the time spent with the mind stopped and happy becomes permanent. But every

second spent with the mind on its source is a second spent in the conscious realization of the nature of your being. The investigation is the realization. It is not the means to realization. And that will stop the mind.

These last two weeks have been incredible for me. I cannot say enough to thank you for these teachings. They have changed my life. It is very easy for me to catch myself and turn my attention inward when I am having a negative *thought or a judgment thought or something that is uncomfortable. It is harder when those thoughts are* positive *and happy.*

Yes, this is precisely the reason why most of the traditions insist that suffering is a gift of Grace. Because it is much easier in the midst of suffering to turn your attention inwards. But when everything is feeling good, it's like, "Whoa, I like this!" Well, there is nothing wrong with liking it. It is just the same old story; because this that you like so much will disappear. With maturity on this path, because it surely is a path, there comes the realization that the sweetness itself is an even greater gift of Grace, because of the opportunity it offers to dispassionately refuse to *fix* on it, to dispassionately be willing to find for *whom* this tastes so sweet. And, in that, to see for yourself whether anything is lost. You must try it.

Gangaji has said it again and again: investigate peace. When peace comes, investigate peace and see. We all know that when the good stuff comes, it doesn't last very long. So the understandable

and quite justifiable inclination is to say, "Well, I am going to enjoy this. I want to just be with this while it is here; and when the bad stuff comes, I'll just go back to my cell." Find out for yourself whether anything is lost by refusing to tend to the sweetness.

For years, I was a recovering Christian Fundamentalist, so I understand it; but that distinction must be made, because I believe Christ was a great teacher.

Christ said, "The kingdom of heaven is within you."

Exactly. And it took Robert Adams, a teacher who you may know of, to teach me what the Bible meant, when it said that God causes the rain to fall on the just and *the unjust.*

Yes, that's right.

That is unconditional love. That is dispassion.

That's right. That's exactly right!

So there is great value in the Christian teachings. But the fundamentalism is hard...

I met Christ as a four-year-old. I was living with my grandmother, who was a Pentecostal Christian (which is about as fundamentalist as you can get) and she taught me to read using

the Gospels as the text. Well, a four-year-old's mind has not been conditioned like an older person's mind to comprehend, "Well, this is what this really means," so the things that were said by Christ as reported in the Gospels went straight home to me. So, I have from time to time commented on the fact that Christ crippled me, and made it impossible for me to be effective in this life, because nothing measures up to what he says. Nothing. Christianity certainly does not — which is mostly a bargain with God: "I'll be good if you let me live forever." So I really agree with that. Christ *was* a great teacher. The great mystery to me about Christianity is that, despite the 2,000 years of obfuscation and denial and confusion and corruption, the power of his teachings still persists.

A teacher recently said, regarding who one is*, "You are the present moment." Do you have a comment?*

I have heard another teacher say, "You are, insofar as you are anything, time."

So, if your self is everything*, that* would *be true, right?*

As true as anything else.

To think of oneself as the present moment is really very personal, however.

Even the present moment is too far away. Your self is much closer. "Now" says it a little closer. But the present moment is too far away.

I just wanted to report what's happening with me in satsang and in this retreat. This process is so intimate, I feel like I am being parented. I feel like a toddler. It is like when you said that there is no place to stand*, I mean literally. I love the concepts, and the words come in; but they are affecting or reaching a different part of me. I don't* care *if I get them or not. But then, I go home and I hear your voice in my head, and Gangaji's and Ramana's, and I look in those eyes and there is something way beyond words that happens here...*

Yes, if what happens here is real, the words are really beside the point.

I sort of wanted more silence, but the words are beautiful, too. It is very nourishing, whatever it is that happens...

Where is the silence when speaking is happening?

Sometimes I am in the middle of it. I mean, it *is always there. Again, it is shifting focus. Joining in the laughter, and listening to reports, going home again...*

This is like the natural discrimination. There is a discriminating wisdom that sees the difference between joining in the laughter and *listening* to things and that deep, deep *silence* that is really being pointed to. There are no words without that silence. The words happen here, because that is what we are here for. I am speaking to the hearer of words. But there is something much

deeper, and much more intimate, taking place beneath the words, within the words.

I know the words are important, because they carry me through...

Yes, it is important to clear the doubts.

Well, they carry me through those times when I have been so down on myself. I can come home to myself without wrestling so much now, when I am away from work. But when I am at work, there are so many people pulling at me with, "I need this, I need that..." It is just so much human neediness, and I am the one with the sign on my chest that says, "Support Services."

And how lucky they are.

I look in their eyes and I know that what they are asking for is not what they need. I guess the struggle is that I would like to just carry that into my workday so much more, and I know it is not going to happen overnight.

If you keep your attention inward, all will be well. The natural spontaneous response to the needs of people that arises in you, will be absolutely appropriate; and it will be exactly what is needed. And if you refrain from second-guessing yourself, and looking back and judging, "Oh, I should have said it *that* way," you will be able to hold your attention inward much better.

When I just let it happen...

Yes, it happens anyway. You know, this is the thing about surrender also. The idea that you are in charge of how this form meets the needs of others is arrogance. The idea that you are the one who is responsible for determining that just the right thing is said, or just the right thing is given, is arrogance.

And I meet that arrogance over and over.

Yes. And that arrogance, when it is *seen*, is the opportunity to meet the arrogance *deeper*. Find out for whom is this arrogance. Arrogance, when it is really seen, is so absurd. Surrender is automatic. I advise you never to try to get rid of arrogance. *Never try to make yourself better* or more responsive. Just keep your attention on yourself. And let this form and life be used perfectly as it is being used. It is not your job to decide how you should be used. Really. *You* have no idea. Well, maybe you *do* have an idea, but ideas are useless!

The arrogance is a good teacher.

Arrogance is a wonderful teacher.

I felt this incredible energy when you said that there is no place to stand. Quiet freedom. And I love how you said "all of manifestation is the flying coffin," and how all of the universe is everything perceived. And then, when somebody was talking about investigation, you

pointed toward the source of the investigator, and there was just this attributeless, infinite stillness: I don't even dare add clarity. These are just empty words now.

It is your *self*. Keep your attention there, on yourself.

I don't know who is here *to keep the attention there.*

Well, in truth, there is no one. But it does you no good to hold on to that *idea*. Despite the fact that there is no one, just keep your attention on yourself. Until you *forget* to. And then you keep your attention on yourself still.

Mind abiding nowhere.

Yes, just as when you get on the airplane, and it is already too late, you are in it *now*. There is no escape. *No escape*. No security. No place to stand. No consolation possible.

What grace!

That is freedom. You *are* that freedom. You know it is customary to announce to you, "You are free." You are the freedom in which all things whatsoever are free to come and go, to dance and play. *All* thoughts, *all* emotions, all beings. You are freedom. Be that. As if you could be anything else! *Be that*.

Thank you, dear one.

You are very welcome.

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I have projected onto Gangaji and you — and now onto me — a steadiness of attention towards what you are talking about. I love what you said about just letting yourself be used. When I look at your life, your life is to live *this and to talk about it. Even though you say that everything can support this inward attention, I feel like* my *life does not support that. How should I live my life?*

This is what I am talking about. Your attention now is on your *life*. I am suggesting that your attention be *on you*. Let your life be *as it is*. I have nothing to say about this life. *This* life is lived: I did not choose this. I tried very hard to reject this role. Can you believe that? You can ask Gangaji. I tried very hard to reject this role, and it did me no good! None. Your attention now is on your life and how it does not support this. My suggestion to you is that you keep your attention on *that* which you think is not supported by your life. Let your life be!

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I have had some experiences lately of recognizing that thoughts are just thoughts. It seems to me that if you really went all the way with that, that would be all that is needed.

If you go all the way with *anything*, it is all that is needed. The problem is that one minute we think that this is it, and we try to go all the way with it; and then we go, "Oh, wait a minute.

What about *this*? This looks more like it." But the truth is that, if you go all the way with anything, it will take you there. The most direct method is to go all the way with finding yourself. But if you put your whole heart into anything, you are finished. That is surrender. That is putting your whole heart into it. It does not matter what it is. But the most direct method is to put your whole heart into finding yourself, which is what you have been trying to do all your life anyway. I am really happy to hear this report, I really am. And if you go all the way with that, it will take you there. If you go all the way with that, it will take you to yourself.

Do not be distracted. Seek only yourself. Blessed self. Thank you for this retreat.

Om Shanti.

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